Ralph Waldo Emerson
Abraham Lincoln

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant

http://www.archive.org/details/manshallnotliveb00dins

RALPH WALDO EMERSON
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE"

LAY SERMON

DELIVERED BEFORE THE UNITARIAN CHURCHES OF
SHEFFIELD AND BUDA, ILLINOIS ON MARCH 22, 1903

—BY—

JARVIS DINSMOOR

"Man Shall Not Live by Bread Alone"

Early in the seventeenth century, there was going on in Europe, on the part of a small number, a struggle for freedom of thought and religious belief. There was also going on a struggle for commercial supremacy in trade and commerce. It was an age, when men were pressing out for the discovery of new fields, where mind and hand might have opportunity to develop. King Henry the Eighth had severed his relations and his allegiance to the Pope of Rome; but the freedom, claimed for himself, was not granted to his subjects. Domination in matters pertaining to religion was continued; meanwhile laws were being enacted, and patents granted that were favorable and encouraging to the spirit of trade and commerce.

As a resultant of the religious and commercial unrest of that day, existing in England and continental Europe, two different vessels were loaded with freight and passengers and set sail for America.

One of these, known in history as the Mayflower, reached these shores in December, 1620, with perhaps a hundred persons—men, women and children.

They landed upon a rock-bound and barren coast; no reception, by the hand of man, had been made for their arrival; no table spread with food; no roof made by man was ready to shelter them from the storm; no army of soldiers, no cannon to guard them and keep them safe, through the defenseless watches of the night. Those, who, in that day and age, "lived to the present and not to the future," wondered and asked, what they went there for; the commercialism of Europe branded the little band as "fanatics" and "impractical." Mrs. Hemans, in her touching and beautiful poem, familiar to us all, both asks and answers the question:

"What sought they thus afar?
Bright jewels of the mine?
The wealth of seas, the spoils of war?—
They sought a faith's pure shrine!"

"Ay, call it holy ground,
The soil where first they trod;
They have left unstained what there they found,—
Freedom to worship God."

The other vessel to which I have referred, started from Europe about sixteen months in advance of the Mayflower; finally landed, after sailing up the James river for some distance, in Virginia; it was summer; the soil where they landed was fertile; propitious skies were above their heads, and the hands of their fellows were extended to greet them, when their feet touched the shore.

The company, who disembarked from this vessel were somewhat different from the company, that was in the one first spoken of. Just how many white men there were, history does not record; or whether there were any white women among the number is alike questionable; but the commercial annals of our country has preserved the fact that there were twenty Africans, who were sold into slavery to the colonists by the Dutchmen who owned, managed, guided and directed that vessel up the peaceful waters of the James.

It was the spirit of gain, regardless of the rights of others, that sent this vessel on its long voyage and disposed so quickly of its cargo of precious freight, and returned with "The wealth of seas," and the "spoils of war."

For a century or more, laws were enacted in the mother country, England, that fostered, sanctioned and encouraged future transactions in slaves.

Before the passengers in the Mayflower had set foot upon the rocks, they entered into a solemn compact among themselves, in these words:

"In the name of God, amen; we whose names are under written, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign King James, having undertaken for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do, by these presents, solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God, and one another, cov-

enant and combine ourselves together, into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof, to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most convenient for the general good of the colony. Unto which we promise all due submission and obedience."

Thus were planted in America, well nigh side by side, the spirit of liberty, humanity, largeness of heart, co-operation, and the spirit of slavery, intolerance, selfishness and commercial greed.

It must not be understood that, one of these companies was unmixed good and the other unmixed evil; it is enough for our purpose to say, that they symbolize two ideas, that have struggled together since the ages began—the one spiritual and the other material.

On May 25, 1803, Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in Boston. On February 12, 1809, Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky. Emerson, richly endowed by descent from a long line of spiritually minded ancestry, passed through the artificial schools of his day, but ever cherished the better education derived from communion with nature. Lincoln had no training of the schools, but was educated by mingling in the stern affairs of life, and studying the great ethical teachers of the world.

"Man shall not live by bread alone." Behind the act is the thought. Behind the actor is the thinker. Among the men of the last century, the work and worth of Emerson and Lincoln stand closer related than any other two. One eminent in the field of thought; the other eminent in the field of action; and both students of the laws, that have to do with the permanent well-being of society or mankind. Emerson was the largest representative, and the deepest breather of that spirit of freedom and charity, which was exemplified in the career of Lincoln,

The work and the worth of these two men, neither of whom was justly and fairly estimated while living, will teach the present, and generations to come, that it is not possible to disentangle religion, and by that I mean "morality touched with emotion," from social and political life.

"Every crime is punished, every virtue rewarded, every wrong redressed, in silence and certainty." How true, and withal comforting, this thought of Emerson's. That nature does keep her balance true; no violation of her laws goes unpunished; there is no escape from the consequence of violation of the laws of nature. These are cardinal principles in the philosophy of Emerson. But just here, came the collision between him and the organized keepers and representatives of religion, who promised upon certain terms absolution or

quittance for violations of law, and claimed that under certain circumstances the stain could be removed.

Another point. Whence comes the law? Whence comes the law giver? If the law of yesterday sanctions the act of yesterday, whether written amid the thunderings of Sinai, or witnessed by an earthquake, on tables of stone or on the parchment scroll, is it thereby rendered so sacred that it cannot, forever after, be questioned? Is there any organized court among men, that can draw the line in these matters, and say—thus far shalt thou go and no further? Emerson answered "No," and replied: "That there is nothing sacred but the integrity of your own mind." "There is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening we shall hear the right word." Again, he says that it is the duty of each man—"to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages."

The large democratic spirit, with which these words are regnant, finally bore fruit in the political life of this country, when the hand of Lincoln was nerved to write the emancipation proclamation, thus stamping as violative of natural law, though it had not been of written, and as it was thought by some of divine law, the purchase of the twenty Africans in Virginia in 1619.

This affirmation of Emerson's: "That crime is surely punished; that within the flower of the pleasure, slowly but surely the fruit unsuspected ripens," had national confirmation, when Lincoln, forty-one days before his death, as the mouth piece of the political society, that had sprung from the simple compact executed on board the Mayflower, uttered this memorable prayer and confession:

"Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations."

It is not my purpose, further, to draw the parallel between these two men, other than to call attention to the fact, that his deed and his words, just quoted, combine to link him inseparably with the spirit of freedom and liberty, for mind and hand, that was planted by the men and women, who

disembarked from the Mayflower in December 1620, and found its purest and loftiest incarnation in the flesh and blood that moved among men, in the century just gone, in the person of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Let us consider and think about him. If able, I would like to show, how strong he was; how gentle he was; how he entered into the manifold perplexities that encompass men in this life, and sought to be a guiding star "out of hell up to light;" how he laid his mind bare and naked to all the spiritual impressions of his day, that he might be a truthful witness, thereof, to his fellow men; how carefully and accurately he observed what was going on, in the field, on the farm, in the shop, in the town, in the city, in the state, in social life, in political life to the end that he might be eye, hand, and conscience to that great throng—humanity; how clear his vision was, into and toward "the undiscover'd country from whose bourn no traveler returns;" how the liberal spirit, that permeates the popular literature of our day, and the catholicity in religious matters, that is now invading orthodox pulpit and pew, is all packed away in the few volumes, that constitute his published works; how, beneath all the angry disputes and the clashing, now existing between corporate life and natural life, as to the share of each in the garnered riches in the earth, are his potent words: "That every child,

that is born must have a just share for bread"—"That the equitable rule is, that no one should take more than his share, let him be ever so rich."

Though we can not take up this large and difficult task, we will attempt to tell who Emerson was, as revealed in spoken word. If he had been simply a ruler in the business or political world, like Saladin, the champion of Islamism, Alexander the Great, or some merchant prince, the work might be easily done. A life current pure and deep; twice, and more, the span that measures Jesus' stay on earth. His critics say, that he had no creed and belonged to no church. That argues the largeness of his spiritual nature; too large, indeed, to be fettered, and so intensely real. In the spiritual realm, he was what Sir Isaac Newton and Michael Faraday were in the physical realm. It will give some idea, of his office and function as a spiritual guide, if I say, he was a physician, who took his own medicine; he was a priest, who taught or enforced his lessons of piety by practising what he preached. But, you ask what was the secret of Emerson's spiritual life and example. Allow me to answer this question, pertaining to the spiritual realm, in terms of the physical. If I mistake not, the spiritual realm was as real to Emerson, as is the physical to the ordinary adult mind.

Imagine Emerson flung into, or dropped upon the ocean, that washes the shore of both England

and America; no hull near, no canopy but the starry vault, naught beneath but fathoms deep of water, no tremor of fear—serene, unfaltering trust, as rests the infant on its mother's breast. Change these terms from physical to spiritual, and you have the secret of the spiritual life of Emerson, who thought, as Geologists tell us that the waters once swept around this globe, it being one of the myriad of worlds, that had sprung from creative power, so around the soul of man sweeps, what the Bramin calls Brama, and the christian calls God.

His soul felt itself bathed and inundated by the Great Soul, outside and beyond himself. Deeply sensitive of this occult relationship, he humbled himself; was content to be the medium through which, the spirit might speak to the multitude of his fellow men. He therefore became a courier, a bearer of special messages from the realm of Light to the realm of earth. It was impossible, therefore, for him to be false or a hypocrite, and he became an apostle of light, an intercessor and a pleader. As man, under primitive relations, lays his ear close to mother earth, who, he knows, can not lie or deceive, to catch any tidings she bears of approaching friend or foe, so Emerson gave us the example of a man, holding his ear where no voice but the divine one could be heard. This being true, it must needs be that some would take offense, and turn back to the flesh pots of Egypt. Those espec-

ially, who are absorbed in forms and ceremonies and not, on "that within which passeth show." Emerson did not feed upon, or rest satisfied with, the legends and myths, that have cradled the spiritual and religious life of all nations, but he used these as the rounds, in the ladder which helped him, to climb the Alpine height.

As Sampson broke the new ropes with which he was bound, so Emerson broke the iron bands of theology, and escaped to field, mountain and stream, where in the green tree, the waving harvest, and the stars that shine at night, he saw intelligence in bright precipitate: he saw the "power that makes for righteousness;" he felt a friendship for all these objects of nature, and on the arms of these children of God he falls back in serene confidence, that "no disgrace, no calamity" can happen to him that these can not repair.

I have said that Emerson was a priest; he was prophet too. In 1837 he uttered these words: "If the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts and there abide, the huge world will come around to him." What he asked others to do, he did. And though these words were met with a compassionate smile, he lived long enough, to witness the dawn of his prophecy. Very slowly but steadily, the church is coming to cast aside what he rejected sixty years ago, and taking as corner stones the truths, that his ear detected as the divine message from the Father of light.

But I want to say something, that will exhibit his wealth of tenderness, sympathy and courage in the stern conflict of life.

Let me instance, as an exhibition of his tenderness and sympathy, his attitude toward the communion rite. Emerson, after long and patient thought, had come to the conclusion that—

"The day of formal religion is past, and we are to seek our well-being in the formation of the soul. The Jewish was a religion of forms; it was all body, it had no life, and the Almighty God was pleased to qualify and send forth a man to teach men that they must serve him with the heart; that only that life was religious which was thoroughly good; that sacrifice was smoke and forms were shadows. This man lived and died true to that purpose; and with his blessed word and life before us, Christians must contend that it is a matter of vital importance,—really a duty to commemorate him by a certain form, whether that form be acceptable to their understanding or not. Is not this," he asks, "to make vain the gift of God? Is not this, to turn back the hand on the dial?"

After adding the practical and serious consideration "that it brings those, who do not partake of the communion service, into an unfavorable relation with those who do," he adds:

"Having said this, I have said all. I have no hostility to this institution; I am only stating my want of sympathy with it. I am content that it stand to the end of the world if it please men and please heaven."

I may be a stranger to soul yearnings and heart yearnings, but I venture to affirm that no other hand, since the time when the man of Galilee stooped down and with his finger, upon the shifting sands, wrote what was then too eloquent to fall upon human ear, has touched more tenderly human heart strings, or has betrayed a deeper solicitude for those who have been tossed upon the unrestful sea of dogma and tradition.

A word indicative of his courage. He faced the howling mobs of Boston that, inspired by corporate greed, attempted to stifle free speech, and expressed a willingness to betake himself to the mountains, and chop wood, rather than be a partaker of a prosperity made by the unrequited toil of slaves. When Lovejoy was shot at Alton, Illinois, while defending his printing press from the mob, he said that he "died when it was better not to live." He gave John Brown shelter under his roof, and extended the hand of welcome to Kossuth, the Hungarian exile.

There are two traits, in Emerson's moral and spiritual make up, that stand out in bold relief.

First. His honesty, stern and rugged as the everlasting hills.

Second. His profound recognition of the "power outside ourselves, that makes for righteousness."

With these qualifications, could it be possible

that he would accept the make-shifts, and subterfuges that have been the creatures of the hour in religion, politics and social life? As well might we ask—can the rose bear thistles or the grape-vine figs?

What thought he of the duties of citizenship in our country? Listen to his words:

"Those, who stay away from election, think that one vote will do no good. 'Tis but one step more, to think that one vote will do no harm. But if they should come to be interested in themselves, in their career, they would no more stay away from election than from honesty or affection. Let us have the considerate vote of single men, spoken on their honor and their conscience."

It hardly seems a year ago, since the bodies of a score of shop girls, who were threading their life currents into the fabrics they wove, were wrapped in flames—a living sacrifice to corporate greed, and you ask, what solicitude had he, for the toiler? His reply is: "I would not have the laborer sacrificed to the result." Let there be poorer clothes and better girls.

But what was the measure of his spiritual helpfulness to the inquiring soul, that looks out on this great continuity and web of God, that smiles so peacefully around us. With serene trust he answers:

"All things are known to the soul. It is not to be surprised by any communication. Nothing can

be greater than it. Let those fawn who will. The soul is in her native realm, and it is wider than space, older than time, wide as hope, rich as love."

What thought he of the doctrine of immortality, that question over which Greek Philosophy pondered so deeply? Notice the candor of his words:

"We can not describe the natural history of the Soul, but we know that it is divine. I can not tell, if these wonderful qualities, which housed today in this mortal frame, shall ever re-assemble in equal activity in a similar frame; but this one thing I know; that these qualities did not now begin to exist, can not be sick with my sickness nor buried in any grave."

The religious world, or perhaps, I ought to say the theological world, has gone on the assumption, that there is war or estrangement between God and man, and therefore the divine excellence is remote and afar off; it has long been taught, and is now, doubtlessly by some, that Jesus was the only man inundated by the divine spirit. These ideas have long held captive many minds, but the dawn of an emancipation was heralded when our teacher announced: "the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God." Here we touch the highest point in the philosophy of Emerson; a recognition of the Soul-hood in man—the divine spark in every man; and so he values life, and looks lightly upon the artificial re-

straints and estimates of the social and political world. It is the spirit, in which work is done, that enobles it, and hence he says:

"Let the great Soul incarnated in some woman's form, poor and sad and single, in some Dolly or Joan, go out to service, and sweep chambers and scour floors, and its effulgent daybeams cannot be muffled or hid, but to sweep and scour will instantly appear supreme and beautiful actions, the top and radiance of human life, and all people will get mops and brooms; until lo! suddenly the great Soul has enshrined itself in some other form, and done some other deed, and that is now the flower and head of all living nature."

What a student of all natural objects, he was? At fading twilight, he finds a poor mushroom gently pushing its way through the frosty ground, with the hard crust upon its head, and it symbolizes to him, the power of kindness pushing its way through the hard rough ways of man's life, and looking up, to the stars, through "the atmosphere made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime," he catches a glimpse of that better day, which his strong faith has so vividly portrayed, when "all men will be lovers; and every calamity will be dissolved in the universal sunshine."

I am told by military men that the few moments, that elapse between the order to advance and the actual engagement, are more trying than

any subsequent ones. The soul, as it were, retreats upon itself. Such moments vouchsafed the warrior, in which to weigh probabilities, and after results, we find noted and emphasized in the biographies of the spiritual leaders of mankind. Jesus, in a certain moment of his existence, is reported to have said: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye can not bear them now"—"ye can not bear them now." I do not lay as much stress upon what he is reported as saying (since the day for the study of words has passed, and the day for the study of life has come) as I do, that it gives us an intimation of the great thoughts, that were tumbling in the soul—too big for birth—a travail more awful than Gethsemane.

Fortunately, Emerson has been his own biographer; at the outset of his career, as was Jesus, so was he, led to the same mountain height, where he pondered deeply these questions:

"Will the community in which I live bear to be told, that every man should be open to ectasy or a divine illumination, and his daily walk elevated by intercourse with the spiritual world?"

Again: "Are there two classes, originally speaking, the good and bad; or is man—ONE," though seen under different skies, varying moods, and ever changing environment?

It is entirely inadequate, though absolutely true, to say that Emerson answered these questions, —"yes."

Here, not at the end but only the beginning,

we stop; what he threw into the alembic of life has not been told, nor can it be; for nothing, but the advancing years will suffice to reveal the weight of the contribution. Faithful-to-his-own-command-ments; — in-and-out-before-men; — think-of-it.—